H. Amelia Douglass
From J. H. H.

Anna Murray Douglass

My Mother as I Recall Her

ROSETTA DOUGLASS SPRAGUE

ANNA MURRAY DOUGLASS

My Mother as I Recall Her

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

ANNA MURRAY DOUGLASS UNION

W. C. T. U.

WASHINGTON, D. C.

MAY 10, 1900 BY

ROSETTA DOUGLASS SPRAGUE

PRICE - 25c
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REPRINTED, FEB. 14, 1923 and DEDICATED
TO THE
NOBLE WOMEN of the N. A. of C. WOMEN

BY

FREDERICKA DOUGLASS SPRAGUE PERRY

FOREWORD

In a little autograph album that I gave my mother on the occasion of her birthday, my grandfather wrote:

"Few things can bring more happiness to the heart
of a parent than the confidence and love of a child."

This tribute to her MOTHER by my MOTHER brings to mind that statement from a father who knew by experience just such joys and who rejoiced to see his daughter enjoying the same.

My mother's devotion to her parents was complete and I am publishing this little booklet that the world may learn some tbing of the noble woman who was the wife of a great man, well known—and the mother of his children.

Too often are the facts of the great sacrifices and heroic efforts of the wives of renowned men overshadowed by the achievements of the men and the wonderful and beautiful part she has played so well is overlooked.

From afar Anna Murray Douglass has watched these many years the gradual decay of the house she loved and wherein she made it cheerfully homelike.

But to-day she stretches out her motherly arms and gathers to her grateful bosom the daughters of her race, joyous over their wonderful accomplishment—the restoration of the home of Anna Murray Douglass the

"MOTHER of CEDAR HILL"

"God thought to give the sweetest thing
In His Almighty power
To earth; and deeply pondering
What it should be, one hour,
In fondest joy and love of heart
Out weighing every other,
He moved the gates of heaven apart
And gave to earth—YOU—mother!" F. D. S. P.

PREFACE

THE traveler standing at the base of a high mountain viewing for the first time its lofty peak as it towers above him feels his insignificance. He scans its rugged sides with an irresistible desire to know what is hidden at its summit. Not content to stand looking upward, feeding his imagination by silently gazing, he must mount and explore and with no realization of the obstacles to be encountered, but with a determined purpose, he prepares to ascend.

This but epitomizes life. Real life is a struggle, an activity, a will to execute. Desire precedes effort. Life with no desire, no effort is merely an existence, and is void of the elements that make life worth the living.

There have been many who have iterated and re-iterated this idea in as many forms of expression as the individuality of the writers themselves. Life is as the mountain, it may be said to have its base, its rugged sides and its summit.

Looking backward over a space of fifty years or more, I have in remembrance two travelers whose lives were real in their activity; two lives that have indelibly impressed themselves upon my memory; two lives whose energy and best ability were exerted to make my life what it should be, and who gave me a home where wisdom and industry went hand in hand; where instruction was given that a cultivated brain and an industrious hand were the twin conditions that lead to a well balanced and useful life.

These two lives were embodied in the personalities of Frederick Douglass and Anna Murray Douglass, his wife.

They met at the base of a mountain of wrong and oppression, victims of the slave power as it existed over sixty years ago. One, smarting under the manifold hardships as a slave, the other in many ways suffering from the effects of such a system.

The story of Frederick Douglass' hopes and aspirations and longing desire for freedom has been told—you all know it. It was a story made possible through the unswerving loyalty of Anna Murray, to whose memory this paper is written.

ANNA MURRAY was born in Denton, Caroline Co., Maryland, an adjoining county to that in which my father was born. The exact date of her birth is not known. Her parents Bambarra Murray and Mary his wife were slaves, their family consisted of twelve children seven of whom were born in slavery and five born in freedom. My mother the eighth child escaped by the short period of one month the fate of her older brothers and sisters, and was the first free child. Remaining with her parents until she was seventeen, she felt it time that she should be entirely self-supporting and with that idea she left her country home and went to Baltimore, sought employment in a French family by the name of Montell whom she served two years. Doubtless it was while with them she gained her first idea as to household

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

management which served her so well in after years and which gained for her the reputation of a thorough and competent housekeeper. On leaving the Montells', she served in a family by the name of Wells living on S. Caroline Street, Mr. Wells was Post-master at the time of my father's escape from slavery. It interested me very much in one of my recent visits to Baltimore, to go to that house accompanied by an old friend of my parents of those early days, who as a free woman was enabled with others to make my father's life easier while he was a slave in that city. This house is owned now by a colored man. In going through the house I endeavored to remember its appointments, so frequently spoken of by my mother, for she had lived with this family seven years and an attachment sprang up between her and the members of that household, the memory of which gave her pleasure to recall.

The free people of Baltimore had their own circles from which the slaves were excluded, the ruling of them out of their society resulted more from the desire of the slaveholder than from any great wish of the free people themselves. If a slave would dare to hazard all danger and enter among the free people he would be received. To such a little circle of free people—a circle a little more exclusive than some others, Frederick Bailey was welcomed. Anna Murray, to whom he had given his heart, sympathized with him and she devoted all her energies to assist him.

Note: Attaining freedom, Frederick Bailey changed his name to Douglass.

The three weeks prior to the escape were busy and anxious weeks for Anna Murray. She had lived with the Wells family so long and having been able to save the greater part of her earnings was willing to share with the man she loved that he might gain the freedom he yearned to possess. Her courage, her sympathy at the start was the main-spring that supported the career of Frederick Douglass. As is the condition of most wives her identity became merged into that of the husband. Thus only the few of their friends in the North really knew and appreciated the full value of the woman who presided over the Douglass home for forty-four years. When the escaped slave and future husband of Anna Murray had reached New York in safety, his first act was to write to her of his arrival and as they had previously arranged she was to come on immediately—reaching New York a week later, they married and at once took their wedding trip to New Bedford.

In "My Bondage and Freedom," by Frederick Douglass, a graphic account of that trip is given. The little that they possessed was the outcome of the industrial and economical habits that were characteristic of my mother. She had brought with her sufficient goods and chattels to fit up comfortably two rooms in her New Bedford home—a feather bed with pillows, bed linen, dishes, knives, forks and spoons, besides a well filled trunk of wearing apparel for herself. A new plum colored silk dress was her wedding gown. To my child eyes that dress was very

fine. She had previously sold one of her feather beds to assist in defraying the expenses of the flight from bondage. The early days in New Bedford were spent in daily toil, the wife at the wash board, the husband with saw, buck and axe. I have frequently listened to the rehearsal of those early days of endeavor. Looking around me at the well appointed home built up from the labors of the father and mother under so much difficulty, I found it hard to realize that it was a fact. After the day of toil they would seek their little home of two rooms and the meal of the day that was most enjoyable was the supper, nicely prepared by mother. Father frequently spoke of the neatly set table with its snowy white cloth—coarse tho' it was. In 1890 I was taken by my father to these rooms on Elm Street, New Bedford, Mass., overlooking Buzzards Bay. This was my birth place. Every detail as to the early housekeeping was gone over, it was indelibly impressed upon his mind, even to the hanging of a towel on a particular nail. Many of the dishes used by my mother at that time were in our Rochester home and kept as souvenirs of those first days of housekeeping. The fire that destroyed that home in 1872, also destroyed them.

Three of the family had their birthplace in New Bedford. When after having written his first narrative, father built himself a nice little cottage in Lynn, Mass., and moved his family there, before making his first trip to Europe.

Note: The Douglass children were Rosetta (first born) Lewis Henry, Frederick, Charles Remond, Anna (d. at 6)

Page 15 CEDAR HILL

He was absent during the years '45 and '46. It was then that mother with four children, the eldest in her sixth year struggled to maintain the family amid much that would dampen the courage of many a young woman of to-day. I had previously been taken to Albany by my father as a means of lightening the burden for mother. Abigail and Lydia Mott cousins of Lucretia Mott desired to have the care of me. During the absence of father, mother sustained her little family by binding shoes. Mother had many friends in the Anti-slavery circle of Lynn and Boston who recognized her sterling qualities, and who encouraged her during the long absence of her husband. Those were days of anxious worry. The narrative of Frederick Douglass with its bold utterances of truth, with the names of the parties with whom he had been associated in slave life, so incensed the slaveholders that it was doubtful if ever he would return to this country. There was also the danger that mother and those who had aided in his escape might be pursued. It was with reluctance father consented to leave the country, and not until he was assured by the many friends that mother and the children would be carefully guarded, would he go.

There was among the Anti-Slavery people of Massachusetts a fraternal spirit born of the noble purpose near their heart that served as an uplifter and encouraged the best energies in each individual, and mother from contact with the great and noble workers grew and improved

even more than ever before. She was a recognized co-worker in the Anti-Slavery Societies of Lynn and Boston, and no circle was felt to be complete without her presence. There was a weekly gathering of the women to prepare articles for the Annual Anti-Slavery Fair held in Faneuil Hall, Boston. At that time mother would spend the week in attendance having charge, in company with a committee of ladies of which she was one, of the refreshments. The New England women were all workers and there was no shirking of responsibility—all worked. It became the custom of the ladies of the Lynn society each to take her turn in assisting mother in her household duties on the morning of the day that the sewing circle met so as to be sure of her meeting with them. It was mother's custom to put aside the earnings from a certain number of shoes that she had bound as her donation to the Anti-Slavery cause. Being frugal and economical she was also able to put by a portion of her earnings for a rainy day. I have often heard my father speak in admiration of mother's executive ability. During his absence abroad, he sent, as he could, support for his family, and on his coming home he supposed there would be some bills to settle. One day while talking over their affairs, mother arose and quietly going to a bureau drawer produced a bank book with the sums deposited just in the proportion father had sent, the book also contained deposits of her own earnings—and not a debt had been contracted during his absence.

The greatest trial, perhaps, that mother was called upon to endure, after parting from her Baltimore friends several years before, was the leaving her Massachusetts home for the Rochester home where father established the "North Star." She never forgot her old friends and delighted to speak of them up to her last illness. Wendell Phillips, Wm. Lloyd Garrison, Sydney Howard Gay and many more with their wives were particularly kind to her. At one of the Anti-Slavery conventions held in Syracuse, father and mother were the guests of Rev. Samuel J. May, a Unitarian minister and an ardent Anti-Slavery friend. The spacious parlors of the May mansion were thrown open for a reception in their honor and where she could meet her old Boston friends. The refreshments were served on trays, one of which placed upon an improvised table made by the sitting close together of Wendell Phillips, Wm. Lloyd Garrison and Sydney Howard Gay, mother was invited to sit, the four making an interesting tableaux. Mother occasionally traveled with father on his short trips, but not as often as he would have liked as she was a housekeeper who felt that her presence was necessary in the home, as she was wont to say "to keep things straight." Her life in Rochester was not less active in the cause of the slave, if anything she was more self-sacrificing, and it was a long time after her residence there before she was understood. The atmosphere in which she was placed lacked the genial cordiality that greeted her in her Massachusetts home,

DOUGLASS HOME

There were only the few that learned to know her, for she drew around herself a certain reserve, after meeting her new acquaintances that forbade any very near approach to her. Prejudice in the early 40's in Rochester ran rampant and mother became more distrustful. There were a few loyal co-workers and she set herself assiduously to work. In the home, with the aid of a laundress only, she managed her household. She watched with a great deal of interest and no little pride the growth in the public life of my father, and in every possible way that she was capable of aided him by relieving him of all the management of the home as it increased in size and in its appointments. It was her pleasure to know when he stood up before an audience that his linen was immaculate and that she had made it so, for no matter how well the laundry was done for the family, she must with her own hands smooth the tucks in father's linen and when he was on a long journey she would forward at a given point a fresh supply. Being herself one of the first agents of the Underground Railroad she was an untiring worker along that line. To be able to accommodate in a comfortable manner the fugitives that passed our way, father enlarged his home where a suite of rooms could be made ready for those fleeing to Canada. It was no unusual occurrence for mother to be called up at all hours of the night, cold or hot, as the case might be, to prepare supper for a hungry lot of fleeing humanity.

She was greatly interested in the publication of the "North Star" or Frederick Douglass' paper as it was called later on, and publication day was always a day for extra rejoicing as each weekly paper was felt to be another arrow sent on its way to do the work of puncturing the veil that shrouded a whole race in gloom. Mother felt it her duty to have her table well supplied with extra provisions that day, a custom that we, child-like, fully appreciated. Our home was two miles from the center of the city, where our office was situated, and many times did we trudge through snow knee-deep, as street cars were unknown. During one of the Summer vacations the question arose in father's mind as to how his sons should be employed, for them to run wild through the streets was out of the question. There was much hostile feeling against the colored boys and as he would be from home the most of the time, he felt anxious about them. Mother came to the rescue with the suggestion that they be taken into the office and taught the case. They were little fellows and the thought had not occurred to father. He acted upon the suggestion and at the ages of eleven and nine they were perched upon blocks and given their first lesson in printer's ink, besides carrying papers and mailing them.

DEVOTION

FATHER was mother's honored guest. He was from home so often that his homecomings were events that she thought worthy of extra notice, and caused renewed activity. Everything was done that could be to add to his comfort. She also found time to care for four other boys at different times. As they became members of our home circle, the care of their clothing was as carefully seen to as her own children's and they delighted in calling her MOTHER.

In her early life she was a member of the Methodist church as was father, but in our home there was no family altar. Our custom was to read a chapter in the Bible around the table, each reading a verse in turn until the chapter was completed. She was a person who strived to live a Christian life instead of talking it. She was a woman strong in her likes and dislikes and had large discernment as to the character of those who came around her. Her gift in that direction being very fortunate in the protection of father's interests, especially in the early days of his public life, when there was great apprehension for his safety. She was a woman firm in her opposition to alcoholic drinks, a strict disciplinarian—her no meant no and yes, yes, but more frequently the no's had it, especially when I was the petitioner. So far as I was concerned, I found my father more yielding than my mother, altho' both were rigid as to the matter of obedience.

There was a certain amount of grim humor about mother and perhaps such exhibitions as they occurred were a little startling to those who were unacquainted with her. The reserve in which she held herself made whatever she might attempt of a jocose nature somewhat acrid. She could not be known all at once, she had to be studied. She abhorred shams. In the early 70's she came to Washington and found a large number of people from whom the shackles had recently fallen. She fully realized their condition and considered the gaities that were indulged in as frivolous in the extreme.

On one occasion several young women called upon her and commenting on her spacious parlors and the approaching holiday season, thought it a favorable opportunity to suggest the keeping of an open house. Mother replied: "I have been keeping open house for several weeks. I have it closed now and I expect to keep it closed." The young women thinking mother's understanding was at fault, endeavored to explain. They were assured, however, that they were fully understood. Father, who was present, laughingly pointed to the new bay window, which had been completed only a few days previous to their call. Perhaps no other home received under its roof a more varied class of people than did our home. From the highest dignitaries to the lowliest person, bond or free, white or black, were welcomed, and mother was equally gracious to all. There were a few who presumed on the hospitality of the home and officiously insinuat-

ed themselves and their advice in a manner that was particularly disagreeable to her. This unwelcome attention on the part of the visitor would be vigorously repelled, in a manner more forceful than the said party would deem her capable of. From such a person an erroneous impression of her temper and qualifications would be given, and criticisms sharp and unjust would be made; so that nltho' she had her triumphs, there were trials, and only those who knew her intimately could fully understand and appreciate the enduring patience of the wife and mother.

During her wedded life of forty-four years, whether in adversity or prosperity, she was the same faithful ally, guarding as best she could every interest connected with my father, his life-work and the home. Unfortunately an opportunity for a knowledge of books had been denied to her, the lack of which she greaty deplored. Her increasing family and household duties preventcd any great advancement, altho' she was able to read a little. By contact with people of culture and education, and they were her real friends, her improvement was marked. She took a lively interest in every phase of the Anti-Slavery movement, an interest that father took full pains to foster and to keep her intelligently informed. I was instructed to read to her. She was a good listcner, mnking comments on passing events, which were well worth consideration, altho' the manner of the presentation of them might provoke a smile. Her value was

fully appreciated by my father, and in one of his letters to Thomas Auld (his former master), he says: "Instead of finding my companion a burden she is truly a helpmeet."

In 1882, this remarkable woman, for in many ways she was remarkable, was stricken with paralysis, and for four weeks was a great sufferer. Altho' perfectly helpless, she insisted from her sick bed to direct her home affairs. The orders were given with precision and they were obeyed with alacrity. Her fortitude and patience up to within ten days of her death were very great. She helped us to bear her burden. Many letters on condolence from those who had met her and upon whom pleasant impressions had been made, were received. Hon. J. M. Dalzell of Ohio, wrote thus:

"You know I never met your good wife but once and then her welcome was so warm and sincere and uneffected, her manner altogether so motherly, and her good-bye so full of genuine kindness and hospitality, as to impress me tenderly and fill my eyes with tears as I now recall it."

Prof. Peter H. Clark of Cincinnati, Ohio, wrote: "The kind treatment given to us and our little one so many years ago won for her a place in our hearts from which no lapse of time could move her. To us she was ever kind and good and our mourning because of her death, is heartfelt."

ROSETTA DOUGLASS SPRAGUE

There is much room for reflection in the review of the life of such a woman as Anna Murray Douglass. Unlettered tho' she was, there was a strength of character and of purpose that won for her the respect of the noblest and best. She was a woman who strove to inculcate in the minds of her children the highest principles of morality and virtue both by precept and example. She was not well versed in the polite etiquette of the drawing room, the rules for the same being found in the many treatises devoted to that branch of literature. She was possessed of a much broader culture, and with discernment born of intelligent observation, and wise discrimination she welcomed all with the hearty manner of a noble soul.

I have thus striven to give you a glimpse of my mother, in so doing I am conscious of having made frequent mention of my father. It is difficult to say anything of mother without the mention of father, her life was so enveloped in his. Together they rest side by side, and most befittingly, within sight of the dear old home of hallowed memories and from which the panting fugitive, the weary traveler, the lonely emigrant of every clime, received food and shelter.

"...e Afro American
Feb. 4, 1939

Anna Murray Sells Her Feather Bed to Pay the Expenses of Frederick Douglass's Flight from Slavery

She Joined Him in New York (1838) Where They Were Married

The Honeymooners Set Up Housekeeping in New Bedford, Mass., with All the Furniture Provided by Mrs. Douglass

In Freedom They Earned a Living; She at the Washboard, He Sawing Wood. Later She Turned to Shoe-Making

As Their Fortunes Improved Mrs. Douglass Became the Perfect Housekeeper, the Gracious Hostess and the Family Banker

She Was a Co-Worker in His Anti-Slavery Societies, and Her Home Housed Many a Fugitive Slave Escaping from the South

When She Died in 1882 She Had Lived Happily Wed to the Greatest American for 44 Years

By ROSETTA DOUGLASS SPRAGUE

In "My Mother as I Recall Her."

Anna Murray was born in Denton, Caroline County, Maryland, an adjoining county to that in which my father was born.

The exact date of her birth is not known.

Her parents, Bambarra Murray, and Mary, his wife, were slaves. Their family consisted of twelve children—seven of whom were born in slavery, and five born in freedom.

My mother, the eighth child escaped by the short period of one month the fate of her elder brothers and sisters, and was the first free child.

Remaining with her parents until she was seventeen, she felt it time that she should be entirely self-supporting and with that idea she left her country home and went to Baltimore, sought employment in a French family by the name of Montell whom she served two years.

Doubtless it was while with them she gained her first idea as to household management, which served her so well in after years and which gained for her the reputation of a thorough and competent housekeeper. On leaving the Montells', she served in a family by the name of Wells living on S. Carolina Street.

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(FOL. 32.) THE WIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

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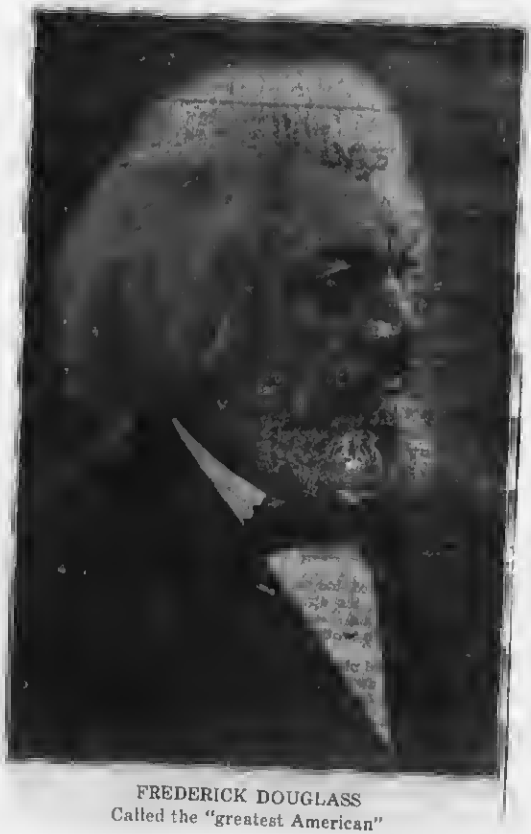
East view of Cedar Hill and driveway as it appeared in the time of Frederick Douglass.

MRS. ANNA MURRAY DOUGLASS,
the abolitionist's inspiration for forty-four years.

Little known photo of Frederick Douglass in his library with Frank, his mastiff dog and constant companion. The animal died of grief a few weeks after his master's death.



FREDERICK DOUGLASS
Called the "greatest American"